

El Malpais National Conservation Area
Bureau of Land Management
FY 2009 Manager's Report

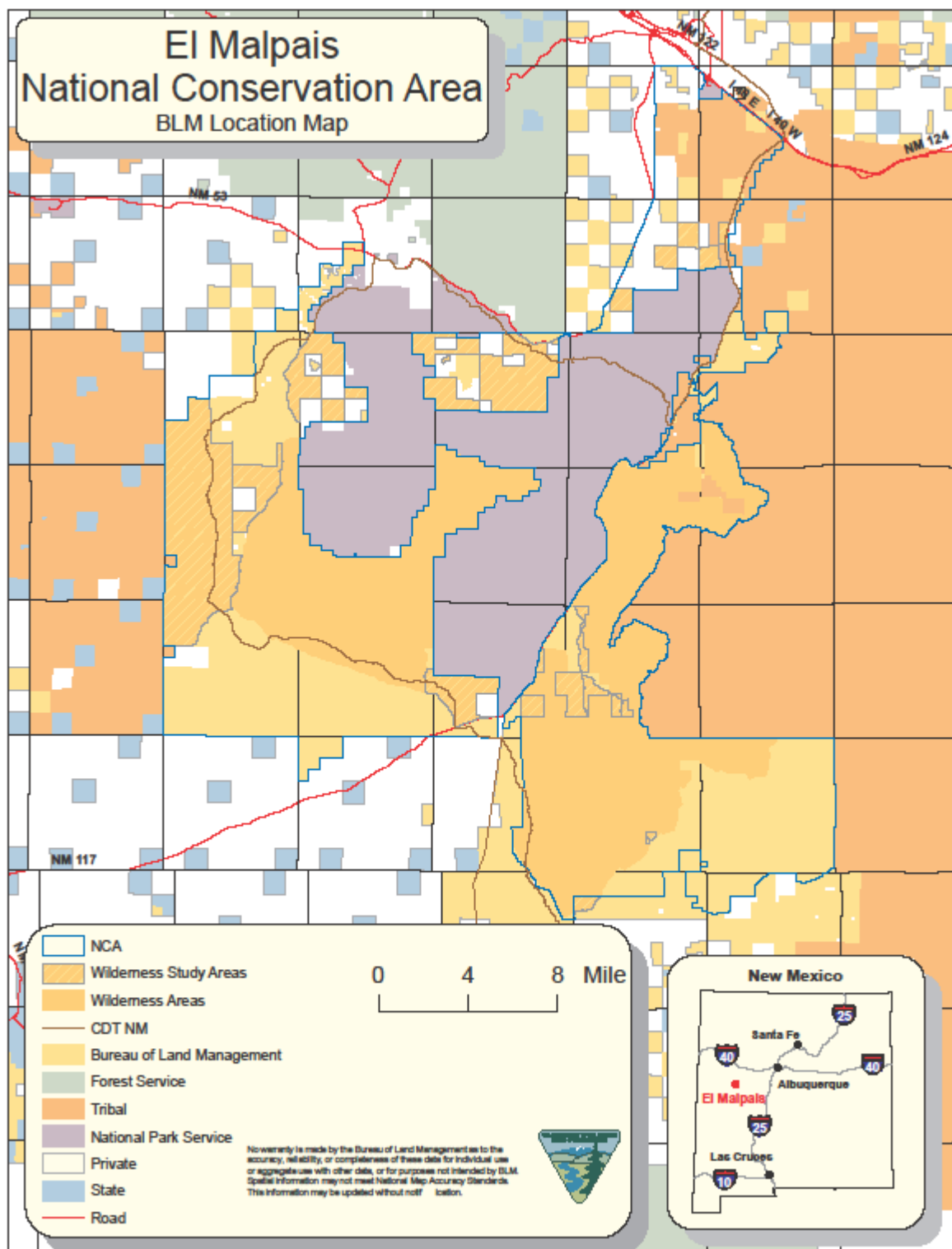
**BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM**

**El Malpais National Conservation Area
FY 2009 Manager's Report**

- Unit: El Malpais National Conservation Area
Rio Puerco Field Office
BLM New Mexico State Office
- Contact Information: Grants Field Station
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www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/prog/recreation/rio_puerco/el_malpais.html
- Manager: Ken Jones, Supervisory Park Ranger
Ken_Jones@nm.blm.gov
- Established: Public Law 100-225, December 31, 1987
- Acreage: 229,550 BLM acres
- Annual visitation: 57,513



SECTION I – NATURAL AND HERITAGE RESOURCES CONDITION

Natural Resources Trends

- Initial monitoring data suggest a relocation of Gunnison's prairie dogs was successful and monitoring will continue following the 2009-2010 winter hibernation period.
- Efforts continue to document avian populations in the El Malpais area. The current species list stands at 214. Of this total 106 species have been documented in the Cebolla Canyon riparian restoration area. A higher number of wetland obligate species were recorded this year. A Black Phoebe was documented this year; a first for the Cebolla Canyon riparian area.
- Prior to acquisition by BLM, land practices had led to serious decline in the riparian conditions of the land. The NCA is committed to restoring all riparian ecosystems to Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) and will be planning projects aimed toward the rehabilitation of Cebolla Spring.

Heritage Resources Trends

Cultural Recourses

- El Malpais NCA contains abundant cultural resources including Paleoindian- and Archaic-period lithic scatters, Anasazi sites, Ancestral and historic puebloan sites, Navajo sites, and Anglo and Hispanic homesteads. Petroglyph panels of varying ages and cultural affiliations are also notable cultural resources in the NCA. A total of 756 archaeological sites have been recorded in the NCA.
- Several homesteads with standing architecture have been fenced for resource protection. Pedestrian access is allowed. The fenced homesteads have had some limited stabilization work to slow the inevitable decay of these structures. However, there is not a formal monitoring program in place that tracks their condition. There are other sites in the NCA with standing architecture that are not fenced, some of which have not been formally recorded.



Wilderness

- Much of the public land within El Malpais NCA is either wilderness or wilderness study area (West Malpais WA, Cebolla WA, Chain of Craters WSA, Canyons WSA, El Malpais ISA). With the addition of staff this year there have been increased opportunities to patrol these areas more effectively. The trend within these areas is stable, but with a continuing problem of motor vehicle incursions, especially during the hunting season (August to May).

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

- The physical condition of the trail is poor to fair. The CDT is more completely described in the trails section below.

Rangeland Health Assessment

- The ecological status of the vegetative community within the National Conservation Area has been classified as 1% early seral, 34% mid seral, and 65% late seral stage.



Inventory

- Approximately 8450 acres have previously been had Class II and III cultural inventories. This figure does not include acres of linear survey along trails and road corridors.
- A volunteer who specializes in detailed recording of rock art sites has completed recording of two significant petroglyph panels within the NCA, as part of a decade long project to document petroglyph sites within the NCA .

Restoration

Gunnison's Prairie Dog Relocation

- In an effort to enhance prairie dog populations in the El Malpais NCA, the Rio Puerco BLM in conjunction with the City of Santa Fe has relocated 250 individual prairie dogs from within the City of Santa Fe to the El Malpais NCA.
- The Gunnison's prairie dog, *Cynomys gunnisoni*, is considered in the scientific literature as a keystone species, one which is not necessarily the most abundant, but exerts a large, stabilizing influence throughout an ecological community. The prairie dog is a crucial food source for many predatory birds and carnivores. The tunnel systems they generate also provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife species including other small mammals, birds, reptiles and arthropods. Also, the highly endangered black-footed ferret depends solely on prairie dogs and their burrow systems for food and shelter.
- Continued population enhancement efforts are targeted toward facilitating the growth and expansion of the current prairie dog population to eventually reach a level appropriate for reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.



Riparian Restoration

- The nature of the proposed projects include slowing soil erosion for improvement of hydrologic processes, relocating Cebolla Canyon Road away from Cebolla Spring and the ephemeral playa lakes, and prescribing and enforcing proper grazing practices for the riparian pastures designated by the BLM. Two volunteer projects were conducted this fiscal year centering on improving stream conditions by constructing one rock damns, baffles, and weirs designed to increase stream meandering and water retention within the riparian zone.
- Livestock trespass in the riparian pastures has been an ongoing problem. A maintenance program was established to ensure fencing projects critical to riparian restoration remain effective. This restoration effort is ongoing and will continue over the next 2-4 years with

monitoring continuing upward of the next 5-10 years. Plans are currently being developed for these restoration and monitoring activities.

- One prescribed fire was conducted; approximately 1500 acres were burned.

SECTION II – RECREATION FACILITIES, ROADS, AND TRAIL CONDITIONS

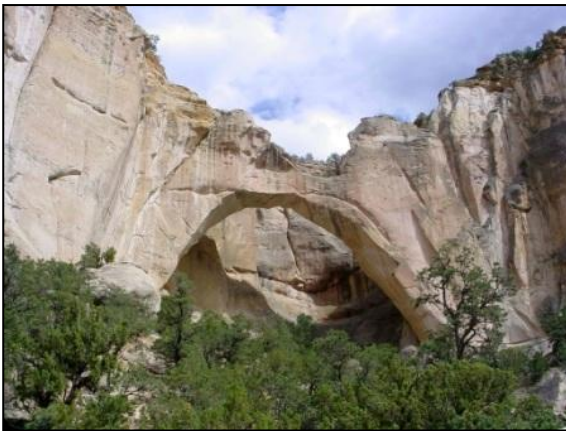
Overview

BLM Ranger Station

- See description under the Visitor's Center section. The Ranger Station is 19 years old and is beginning to show its age.

Joe Skeen Campground

- The Joe Skeen Campground is a small campground with light to moderate use on the east side of the NCA and reached by a quarter-mile unpaved road from Highway 117. It is the only developed campground in the El Malpais area. The campground is under ongoing construction. Ten campsites with picnic tables and fire rings are completed as well as one vault toilet. Final site plans for the new campground will be completed in FY10, but will include a full hookup camp host site. This will allow us to recruit a campground host. The physical condition of the campground is fair due to active construction. When completed, the campground will be in excellent condition.



La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Site

- La Ventana Natural Arch is on the east side of the NCA immediately off of Highway 117. This is the most well-known and heavily used site at the NCA with an estimated visitation of 50,000. The site has a large paved parking area, accessible viewing area, interpretive panels, two vault toilets, trash receptacles, and the trailhead for the La Ventana Natural Arch Trail.
- The physical condition of the site is fair, however; the vault toilets and other amenities are approximately ten years old and need to be replaced and relocated. Future plans will be to replace and relocate the vault toilets to better meet visitor needs including providing space to install picnic tables.

South Narrows Picnic Area

- The South Narrows Picnic Area is on the east side of the NCA immediately off of Highway 117. This is a popular day-use site during most times of the year. The site contains four sheltered picnic sites, one sheltered group site, two vault toilets, trash receptacles, and the trailhead for the Narrows Rim Trail. The physical condition of the

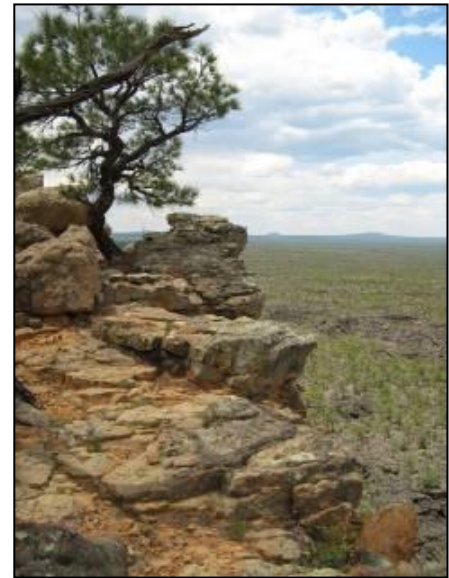
site is good; the only improvement needed is paved access to the vault toilets for ADA compliance. This project should be conducted in the upcoming year.

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

- The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail passes through the western portions of the NCA for about 33 miles, including crossing the Chain of Craters WSA and West Malpais Wilderness. The trail has both marked sections with cairns and signs and section where tread is constructed. Approximately 14 miles of tread way has been constructed, the remainder of the trail is marked with cairns and signs. Another 13 miles has been located and GPS'ed for future designation through the planning process.
- Two trailheads with parking and a bulletin board have been established on the Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway.
- The physical condition of the trail is poor to fair due to staffing limitations, although BLM is working with volunteers to help meet needs and projects are being planned for 2010. Low visitor use results in the vegetation re-growing on portions of the constructed trail making it difficult to follow. In addition, Wildlife and cattle frequently topple cairns and signs.

Narrows Rim Trail

- This trail originates at the South Narrows Picnic Area, extends 4 miles along the tops of the rimrock cliffs of the Cebolla Wilderness, and ends at a point overlooking La Ventana Natural Arch. This trail is the most popular hike at the NCA.
- The physical condition of this trail is good, requiring little maintenance because of the soil type it crosses.



La Ventana Natural Arch Trail

- This is a quarter-mile trail originating at the La Ventana Natural Arch Recreation Site and terminating within the Cebolla Wilderness at a view point for the arch. It is the most heavily used trail at the NCA since it accesses the natural arch.
- While the trail itself is well constructed and maintained and the condition is good, work is needed to respond to damage from surface flows. In addition, social trails leading up the steep hillside to the arch contribute to resource damage.

Nature Trail

- The nature trail at the Ranger Station is a one mile loop route with a short side trail to a view point. Use of the trail is light but increasing as it is promoted by staff at the Ranger Station.
- The trail was used for interpretive hikes during the summer and has been identified as an excellent location for on-site school programs. Several school programs have been scheduled for FY10. These programs will highlight the geologic, cultural, and other natural history subjects found in the vicinity of the Ranger Station and Nature Trail.
- The physical condition of the trail is fair to good with the resource trend declining. Several steep portions of the trail will soon require extensive maintenance.

State Highways

- Two paved state highways provide the immediate access to the NCA: Highway 117 in the east side and Highway 53 in the northwestern side of the NCA. These highways are in good to excellent condition, but are not under BLM jurisdiction.

Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway

- The Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway is approximately 33 miles long on County Road 42. Connecting to both Highways 117 and 53, it is the sole maintained road in the western portions of the NCA. The condition of the road is fair since it receives only minimal maintenance from the county; it is impassible during much of the winter and summer monsoon seasons. The road is not under BLM jurisdiction.

Cebolla Canyon Road

- Cebolla Canyon road provides primary access to the east side of the NCA and bisects the Cebolla Wilderness. The road is rarely maintained and the physical condition is very poor to fair. Resource conditions adjacent to the road are declining, rapidly along some sections due to runoff.
- This route has long been in the deferred maintenance system. Rerouting of a portion of the route around a riparian area is planned for FY10.



Other Roads

- Vehicle use is limited to the more than 270 miles of designated routes identified in the EL Malpais Plan. The majority of these routes are dirt roads and two-tracks which are rarely, if ever, maintained, and as a result add a sense of adventure to travelling in the NCA. The physical condition of almost all of these routes is very poor to poor with some being in fair condition. The resource trend adjacent to these routes is almost always declining to severely declining.
- Frequent illegal off-road vehicle use occurs on closed roads and sometimes cross-country, often into wilderness and wilderness study areas. The NCA is preparing to conduct restoration activities through ARRA funding in 2010.

Maintenance

- Annual maintenance is currently meeting the needs of the public and BLM.
- Major maintenance projects undertaken at the Ranger Station during FY09 included reroofing the building, fog sealing and restriping the parking lot, replacing the HVAC system.
- Construction of the new Grants Field Station, providing administrative office space, was completed in FY09.
- A major deferred project is reconstruction of Cebolla Canyon road.
- This past year the HVAC system and shingles on the roof of the BLM ranger station were replaced, and the parking lot was resurfaced.

Sign Plan

- The NCA has an approved sign plan, but there is a need to revise it.
- Not all current signing meets BLM standards. A major project for 2010 is to inventory the current signing, upgrade/install new signs where needed, and reevaluate sign needs in support of sign plan revision.

SECTION III – OUTREACH, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, INTERPRETATION, AND VOLUNTEERS

Outreach

Outreach efforts include:

- BLM Ranger Station on Highway 117 in the Monument
- Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center in Grants
- Brochures available at the visitor centers
- El Malpais web site (updated in FY09).
http://www.blm.gov/nm/st/en/prog/recreation/rio_puerco/el_malpais.html
- Interpretive signs and kiosks
- Interpretive programs, such as a ranger-guided nature walk series provide by BLM staff
- Environmental education programs provided by BLM staff.
- BLM staff-written articles published in the Grants and Gallup newspapers describing guided hikes and interpretive programs.
- A staff-written article published in a monthly outdoors column describing outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands.
- Fostering relationships with local reporters who have written several articles on NCA events.
- Cable Access TV & KDAC interviewed two BLM rangers to help improve outreach for the NCA.

Visitor Centers

BLM Ranger Station

- The Ranger Station serves the east side of the NCA directly off Highway 117. The facility is open daily and includes permanent exhibits on cultural and natural history and temporary exhibits according to the season. An underused area was converted in FY09 into a “permanent temporary” display area. Impromptu presentations and programs are given at the BLM Ranger Station, with at least 20 in FY09.
- The Public Land Interpretive Association (PLIA) bookstore at the



station provides over one hundred titles for sale. PLIA sales for FY 09 were \$11, 583.64 and \$444.00 was collected thru donations. Estimated center visitation for the year was 6,700.

- Picnic facilities and a nature trail are also provided at the Ranger Station.

Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center

- The Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center is an interagency center operated in partnership with the National Park Service and Forest Service in Grants, NM, on the edge of the El Malpais lava flows. The center operates as a regional visitor center, but with its close proximity to the NCA, there's an emphasis on El Malpais, making it an important facility for the NCA. The facility is open daily and includes exhibits, a bookstore, and interpretive programs.
- International Migratory Bird Day displays were created and exhibited at the Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center and Ranger Station in FY09. These displays consisted of several panels that flowed together to get visitors to migrate down through the facilities while learning about birds and the event day.

Environmental Education

- Staffing levels were improved by summer's end and so NCA staff promoted our curriculum-based programs to area educators along with an application for formal school visits. Four large school-group visits occurred.
- The nature trail outside the Ranger Station is an ideal spot for large-group school visits. Students can easily practice hands-on geology along the trail, and the building provides inclement weather protection and large restrooms.



- Weekly children's programs at the Futures Foundation in Grants: Kids participate in 45- minute to 1-½ hour programs designed to encourage a curiosity in the natural world and visit El Malpais. Programs range from games mimicking bird migration, to nature crafts with autumn leaves and petroglyph art projects. Average attendance is 25 kids, ranging between the ages of 6 and 12. Total participation for Fiscal Year 2009 was 73.

Interpretation

The NCA began BLM Ranger-led guided nature walk series at the BLM Ranger Station during July and August. As the programs gained popularity, the guided hikes expanded to different parts of the NCA. Outreach for the programs now goes to all of Grants and Gallup through local papers, Chambers of Commerce, radio stations, and posting fliers in local businesses, Visitor Centers around the State and Albuquerque and Santa Fe newspapers. Twenty-two on-site interpretive programs were conducted with a total of 201 visitors attending these programs. In addition six other on- and off-site programs were presented for 325 people. The programs were offered to a wide range of audiences of all ages and educational levels. Visitors attending these programs included multi-ethnic local residents, other in-state residents, visitors from many other

states and several foreign nations. A number of these programs had a high level of repeat attendees.

Program Themes include:

- Natural and cultural history of the region including broad concepts of the local ecosystem and native plant identification
- Night-time sensory hikes to explore the world of the nocturnal creatures of El Malpais
- Adventure-based hikes of the Narrow's Rim Trail
- Archaeology hikes

The NCA has eight brochures which provide site-specific information and encourage proper public use. The Narrow's Rim Trail was revised in FY09, revisions of other brochures is planned.

- Dittert Archeological Site
- General Rules and Regulations
- Ranger Station Nature Trail
- West Malpais Wilderness
- Hiking Trails
- Narrows Rim Trail
- Birding Guide to El Malpais
- Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway

The website for El Malpais NCA received approximately 4,200 hits in 2009.

Volunteers

- The NCA currently has eight volunteers on staff; five are new recruits for FY09. Volunteers currently assist NCA staff with Ranger Station operations, interpretive and education program support, resource monitoring, and training. Without volunteers to staff the BLM Ranger Station, NCA staff would be severely limited from performing many of other crucial functions.
- Volunteer groups have contributed numerous hours to restoration projects and trail work. NCA staff traditional work with the Continental Divide Trail Alliance to host volunteer weekends in the spring and currently one short section of the trail has been adopted by a CDTA volunteer.
- NCA staff-led volunteer rehab projects: this year 32 volunteers camped and worked in the canyon from April 17-19, 2009. An additional 23 volunteers participated in an October project. Please see the Manager's Corner for an article from the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation Newsletter.
- During the past year volunteers contributed 920 hours to Ranger Station operations, 24 hours to interpretive and education program support, and 880 hours to riparian area restoration.



SECTION IV- SCIENCE

- Tree Ring dating: Ron Towner of the University of Arizona Tree Ring Lab is conducting tree-ring dating of Historic homesteads and Navajo structures on El Malpais NCA. The University of Arizona's Dendroarchaeology field school included sites on the NCA in field schools.



Photo: University of Arizona Dendroarchaeology Field School student Rachel Delaney samples wood from the Worley Homestead in El Malpais NCA. Photo by Ron Towner.

SECTION V – PARTNERSHIPS

Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center



- The BLM, NPS, and Forest Service cooperatively manage the Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center in Grants, New Mexico. This partnership encourages and promotes the interagency use of personnel across agency boundaries. The goal is to provide excellent visitor service, which transcends visitor expectations and anticipates the needs of those we serve.
- The visitor center serves as a venue for connecting people to the land and special places, showcasing the opportunities for resource conservation and protection for current and future generations.
- As a part of our joint cooperation at the center, the NCA staff joins with our partners to conduct on- and off-site interpretive and education programs.

El Malpais National Monument

- The partnership between the NCA and NM goes back to 1989 when both areas were created by the El Malpais Act. Since then the BLM and NPS have shared expertise and personnel in all management activities. Areas of cooperation include joint planning for

the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, wilderness management, providing staff support for interpretation events, and managing and operating Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center.

Cibola National Forest

- The new Grants Field Station is located within a Forest Service administrative site adding a new element to this partnership. Areas of cooperation include joint planning for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, providing staff support for interpretation events, and managing and operating Northwest New Mexico Visitor Center.

Cebolla Canyon Restoration

- This project, described in the restoration section above, is a partnership which includes the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation. New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, New Mexico Environment Department, Rio Puerco Management Committee, Rio Puerco Alliance, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

City of Santa Fe

- Santa Fe ordinances require that prairie dogs be trapped and relocated when they become a problem or before construction activities can occur. The NCA, a potential reintroduction site for the black-footed ferret, needs a larger prairie dog colony to support the ferret. Prairie dogs trapped in Santa Fe are released at approved sites in the NCA. This partnership is a perfect match for both entities.

Continental Divide Trail Alliance

- The NCA and CDTA have a long-standing partnership dealing with the development, construction and maintenance of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail where it passes thru the NCA. The CDTA helps NCA staff recruit trail volunteers and organize yearly trail volunteer projects.

University of Arizona

- The BLM has developed a partnership with Ron Towner of the University of Arizona's Tree Ring Lab focused on tree-ring dating of Historic homesteads and Navajo structures on El Malpais NCA. The University of Arizona's Dendroarchaeology field school has included sites on the NCA in its last two field schools. This partnership is mutually beneficial as it contributes to Dr. Towner's research, provides educational opportunities through the field school, and provides the BLM with detailed information about its cultural resources that could be used both for management and interpretation.

New Mexico State University

- This new and developing partnership began when several NMSU staff joined the NCA as volunteers. Efforts are currently underway to find ways to share resources and expertise.

Habitat Stamp Program

- The Habitat Stamp Program is a joint effort between the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, non-profit organizations and the general public to plan, develop, maintain, and coordinate conservation and rehabilitation programs that are designed to have a positive impact on

wildlife and fish populations. The completion of three wildlife drinkers took place in El Malpais to benefit antelope. The drinkers are rainwater catchment devices attached to storage tanks that retain water after rainstorms for prolonged use by wildlife.

Futures Foundation in Grants

- An environmental educational partnership has been developed with the Futures Foundations in Grants. The Futures Foundation facility was developed to provide after-school educational opportunities for local youth. NCA staff have developed and presented programs designed to broaden their knowledge of natural and cultural resources found at El Malpais. This partnership began late in FY09.

SECTION VI – PLANNING AND BUSINESS PRACTICES

Planning

- The formal land-use planning process for the El Malpais Plan Area was completed in September 2001 with the approval of the Record of Decision for the *Proposed El Malpais Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (September 2000). The Approved El Malpais Plan amended the *Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan* (RMP). The Approved Plan also included activity-level decisions for management of the resources of the Plan Area.



- The El Malpais Plan was prepared to consolidate all decisions and management guidance currently applicable to the El Malpais Plan Area. The majority of the decisions and guidance are taken from the approved El Malpais Plan.

- Since RMP decisions applicable to the El Malpais Plan Area continue to be valid except as they were amended by the Approved Plan, decisions and guidance from the *Rio Puerco RMP* and its amendments which are applicable to the El Malpais Plan Area are included in this stand-alone El Malpais Plan.
- Activity-level decisions from the Approved Plan and activity-level decisions tiered from the Rio Puerco RMP are also included in this stand-alone plan. This includes a Travel Management Plan.
- The El Malpais Plan is arranged as 21 separate management plans for the various resources managed by the Rio Puerco Field Office in the El Malpais Plan Area. It has been prepared as a resource to be utilized by the RPFO resource specialists who will implement the Plan. Those decisions and guidance that apply to more than one resource are duplicated in each resource section. Each of the 21 resource plan sections is complete on its own to make implementation RPFO resource specialists as straightforward as possible.

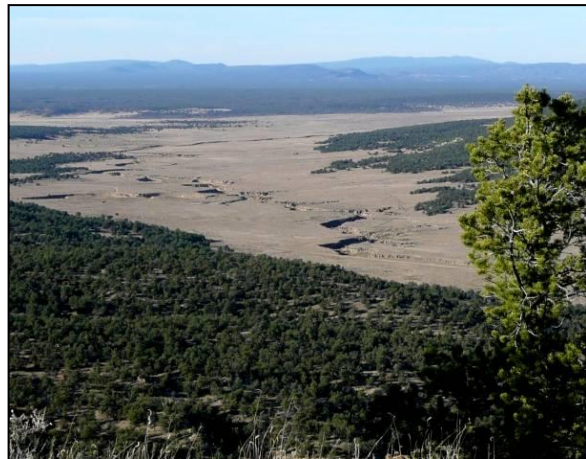
ARRA

- ARRA project funding was received for completion of the Joe Skeen Campground.
- Portions of the Cebolla Canyon route will be rerouted as part of the Cebolla Canyon riparian restoration project. The road relocation is an ARRA funded riparian project, rehabilitation of the old route will also be conducted as a part of this project.
- Frequent illegal off road vehicle use occurs on closed roads or cross country, often into wilderness and wilderness study areas. The NCA is preparing to conduct restoration activities through ARRA funding in 2010.

Budget

- Work months
- Permanent staff
 - Supervisory Park Ranger: 12 work months
 - Park Ranger: 12 work months
 - Park Ranger: 16 work months (filled February 09)
 - Park Ranger: 6 work months (filled June 09)
- Part time staff
 - Park Ranger: 3 work months
- Non unit staff
 - Admin: 4 work months

Total: 53 work months
- Staffing needs
 - Maintenance Worker: 12 work months (position is on the table of organization)



SECTION VII – MANAGER’S CORNER

El Malpais National Conservation Area was established on December 31, 1987, with the passage of the El Malpais Act (Public Law 100-225). The adjoining El Malpais National Monument was established at the same time and is managed by the National Park Service.

The NCA is administered under the Rio Puerco Field Office of the Albuquerque District. The authorized boundary of the NCA encompasses 266,370 acres; approximately 37,000 acres consists of tribal or private land. The NCA includes several other units of the NLCS: West Malpais Wilderness Area, Cebolla Wilderness Area, Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area, El Malpais Instant Study Area, Canyons Wilderness Study Area, and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Other major locations within the NCA include a BLM Ranger Station/Visitor Center, the Chain of Craters Backcountry Byway, South Narrows Picnic Area, Joe Skeen Campground, and La Ventana Natural Arch recreation site. Visitation for FY 2009 is estimated at 57,513. The majority of the visitation occurs at La Ventana Natural Arch and at the BLM Ranger Station/Visitor Center.

The El Malpais Management Plan was completed in September 2001. The plan also addresses management of approximately 24,200 acres of BLM lands outside of but adjoining the NCA. The goal of the El Malpais Plan is to conserve public resources while allowing for their use and enjoyment by the American people. The Plan guides the development and use of the public resources in the El Malpais Area and incorporates applicable decisions from the Rio Puerco Resource Management Plan, Continental Divide Trail Comprehensive Plan, El Malpais NCA Land Protection Plan, and Riparian and Aquatic Habitat Management Plan.

BLM took title to a total of 317.60 acres in the NCA during FY 2009, on the western side of the NCA. There is a current balance of approx \$142,000 of LWCF funds. There are two pending acquisitions of 82 acres that should be completed in FY 2010.

As part of the Rio Puerco Field Office, many of the resource programs at the NCA are managed by resource specialists from that office. The staff at El Malpais is primarily responsible for managing the visitor services, recreation, and wilderness programs; while providing support to other programs when requested.

FY 2009 was challenging at El Malpais; as the year began we were entering our fifth month without an office, work spaces, or IT access. This situation was not remedied until July 2009, when the reconstruction of the building that became the Grants Field Station was completed. The next couple of months were spent moving into the office and trying to reorganize the operation.

The staff at El Malpais also went through drastic changes in the previous fiscal year. The end of 2008 saw a dramatic reduction in staff, losing permanent and seasonal park rangers that were not immediately filled behind. This left the supervisory park ranger and one other park ranger with the responsibility of operation two visitor centers, maintaining recreation sites, patrolling the NCA and accomplishing all related tasks. Efforts were directed at maintaining full time operations at the Center and keeping the BLM Ranger Station/Visitor Center open on weekends. Recreation site maintenance was done as much as possible to keep them safe and clean. Patrols of the NCA were minimal and much field work went undone.

Staffing problems began to ease in FY09 with the addition of two permanent park rangers. This allowed for the resumption of full time BLM Ranger Station/Visitor Center operations position and an increase in maintenance and patrol activities. We were also able to begin reorganizing our volunteer and interpretation/education programs. Two full time park ranger interns were added to the staff in June. This allowed the rest of the staff to begin focusing on management goals and activities and less on day to day operations.

Opening a new office and training a new staff has provided many pleasant challenges. In many ways El Malpais has recreated itself and has been given numerous opportunities to restart and rebuild its programs and activities. With the fresh enthusiasm provided by the new staff, El Malpais is looking forward to future challenges and growth.

The following is the article about a volunteer rehabilitation project printed in the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation Newsletter. Used with permission from *Gene Tatum*.



'This project was a great success due to the participation of the hearty souls who would not let camping in 20 degree weather with winds of 20 mph deter their enjoyment of the beautiful days, meaningful work and camaraderie. Due to the number of volunteers, we were able to divide into three teams: Willow Transplanters, Rock Team, and Wicker Team. Willows were transplanted from upstream to locations primarily on developing point bars to provide stability. The rock structures built in previous years

were reinforced to continue the successful collapse of steep arroyo walls to provide sediment needed to build up and raise the creek bottom. With the help of Steve Carson and Van Clothier, our skills set was expanded to allow for moving big old rocks (boulders). Pickets (juniper poles) were used to build baffles—triangular shaped structures designed to add curvature (meander) to the creek bottom. Meanders add to stream length which slows water flow, allowing more infiltration into the soil to aid growth of riparian vegetation. As we were making coffee for the crew Sunday morning before the sun came over the mesa, I saw a volunteer with a big beautiful smile. That smile was the crowning touch for a great weekend.'

— Gene Tatum, Project Committee Chair for the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation